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Foreign Secretary
for information \$ 24/9

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From:

IPU

Date:

22 September 2006

cc:

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| | | |
|-----|-------------------------------------|--|
| To: | Simon McDonald (see comment at end) | |
| | Foreign Secretary | |

IRAQ: BASRA PALACE COMPOUND: SECURITY

1. At 1220 Iraq local time today, the Basra Palace Compound came under indirect fire attack (IDF) from what is thought to be two rockets. One of the rounds hit an unhardened accommodation unit killing the occupant, a US contractor working for the State Department. There were no (no) British casualties. The Foreign Secretary will want to express her condolences to Secretary Rice when she meets her at the G8 dinner this evening. The PUS spoke to the US Charge earlier today to express condolences, as did Dominic Asquith with the US Charge in Baghdad.
2. This was the fourth attack on the Basra Palace Compound in the last four days. The increase in frequency of attacks is probably in response to the shooting of a JAM leader, Abu Haider, during an UK military arrest operation 18 September. Our Consulate remains at its highest state of alert, with all staff required wearing body armour out of doors.

Could this happen to us?

3. The US compound in Basra does **not** have hardened accommodation resistant to attacks from the current range of ordnance fired against it i.e. 107mm rockets or light to medium mortar shells. Our compound **does** have hardened accommodation that offers a much higher level of protection than that available to US staff. This should not be considered mortar or rocket proof. While unlikely to protect fully against a direct hit, it should provoke detonation outside the building. If the window blind shattered, it could be as dangerous as an exploding missile.
4. Until September, the accuracy rate for attacks on Basra Palace Compound (which covers a wide area including the UN, US, Romanian, UK military and Consulate grounds) was approximately 45%. This accuracy rate means that an attack has managed to drop at least one round into the greater Basra Compound. As far as the Consulate is concerned, very

Page 1

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NR 445/003/06
RECEIVED
21 DEC 2006
157

232

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few rounds actually land within, let alone exploded inside the Consulate perimeter. The figure was at around 7%.

5. However September has seen an increase in rounds fired with more rounds landing in or close to the greater Basra Compound area. Our compound is long and thin, spread from west to east. Shots from the south are pointing in the right direction, but liable to overshoot or drop short. However shots from the east and west – where most recent attacks have come from - have a greater chance of hitting us as they fall on the compound.

What should we do in response to these attacks?

6. We had already taken measures to reduce staff exposure to the current increased threat in Basra as a result of UK military operations e.g. extending R and R leave for staff. In light of this latest attack, we have asked Rosalind Marsden (CG Basra) to review this again and the scope for further drawdown.
7. We should also move our Gurkha Guard Force and others (contractors) out of their current reinforced Red Sea Container (RRSC) accommodation and into hardened accommodation. The RRSCs, while better than unhardened accommodation, do not afford the same level of protection as hardened accommodation. However to do this may mean that some staff will be required to double up and share accommodation. This will impact on morale.

Deputy Head IPU

I agree that it is important to review staffing levels. Many of our staff will be involved in Better Basra project work. Because PM Maliki was unhappy with the detention parts of SALAMANCA, the operation has been redesigned (and renamed SINBAD); we need to be sure that the security environment provided by the reduced operation will allow us to deliver the full Better Basra plan. I also agree that we look again at accommodation. Our 80/90 Gurkhas live in strengthened Red Sea Containers – but these do not provide the same protection as pods. At a time of clearly heightened threat (start of SINBAD) we might temporarily rehouse them in pods. Despite the impact on morale, I think we have to accept that, for a time, other staff may have to share pods.

Simon McDonald

Page 2

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